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Historic Fort Independence and Castle Island

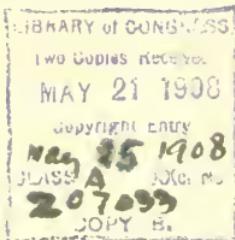


Historic Fort Independence and Castle Island

BY A. F. GREGORY



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Fort Independence and Castle Island.



BOUT two and a half miles from the Charlestown Navy Yard is situated the most beautiful island in Boston Harbor. In the northeast corner of this island, on the old site of Castle William, is Fort Independence, one of the oldest forts in the United States.

The building of this fortification was begun in 1833 and completed in 1837. The structure, pentagonal in shape, and built of granite from the quarries of Cape Ann, is a masterpiece of granite engineering. The only entrance to the fort is the sally-port on the south, on either side of which are rooms, which were formerly used by the officers.



A BATTERY OF TEN INCH GUNS

An inclined plane, leading to the ramparts, over which the heavy guns used to be drawn, is on the west; while on the east and northeast are two long galleries, which were once incased with six and eight ten-inch guns respectively. Standing in a prominent position on the northwest of the ramparts and guarding the channel, is a battery of ten-inch guns.

On each corner of the fort is a bastion, which was formerly guarded by the heaviest guns, four fifteen-inch guns being encased below and two others placed on the ramparts above. Several more batteries were constructed on the ramparts above the galleries, and beside each one may still be seen a powder magazine. Four long flights of stairs lead to the ramparts above.

A fort was built on the island at the time of the settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, early in 1634, and since that time several forts have been erected on the same site and subsequently destroyed. Some of the best fighters in the Revolution and in the War of 1812 received their training in the island fort. After the Boston Massacre, the British royal troops, under General Gage, were removed from Boston Common



NORTHEAST GALLERY AND RAMPARTS

and quartered at the Castle. In 1861 a small-pox epidemic broke out among sixty prisoners held in confinement in the northwest bastion.

At the commencement of hostilities with Spain, early in April of 1898, the Federal government closed the island to the public and turned it into a mining station. The mines and torpedoes used in the Spanish-American War to protect the harbor were all charged and unloaded in the fort. On one occasion, while one of these torpedoes was being transported on a tip-cart, the mine fell to the ground and exploded, killing several men. The explosion was so great that it blew to pieces several granite blocks which formed part of the sea wall.

After the war the island was again given back to the city and opened to the public, the government retaining the fort for storage and mining school.

The island was turned over to the city of Boston early in 1890, when it was connected with Marine Park by a bridge nearly half a mile in length. In April, 1907, the fort was officially turned over to Boston.

The island contains twenty-one acres, and abounds in beautiful elm and chestnut trees.

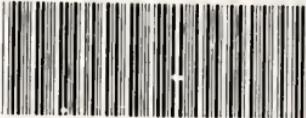
In the cellar of the one-story brick building, still standing after a hundred years, used to be kept the prisoners of the State. An electric battery, which connects with a bell-bouy one-fourth of a mile away from the east side, is also installed in this house.

The hospital was formerly a two-story brick building, situated on the point of the island. Several breastworks and magazines remain to suggest an historical atmosphere.

Castle Island is considered the most ideal section of the Boston Park System, and one of the best summer resorts on the coast. During the summer, hundreds of thousands of people visit the place, and take great pleasure in watching the incoming and outgoing vessels of every description which are obliged to pass the island. From different points may be seen the other islands of the harbor and the various forts and lighthouses.

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